NORMAL FIRE REHABILITATION PLAN SUPPLEMENT
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
AND
DECISION RECORD
WEST PEQUOP FIRE (X-157)
BLM/EK/PL/2001/046

Finding of No Significant Impact:

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan Supplement Environmental Assessment BLM/EK/PL2001/046, I have determined that the proposed action will not have significant impacts on the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Decision:

It is my decision to implement the Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan (NFRP) Supplement as described in the Environmental Assessment for the West Pequop Fire BLM/PL2001/046. Over 1600 acres of public rangeland managed by the Bureau of Land Management Elko Field Office and 1,896 acres of private land were burned during this incident. Approximately 8 miles of dozer line will be rehabilitated and access points to the dozer lines from existing roads will be blocked using mechanical means. Approximately 0.3 miles of fence would be repaired to facilitate grazing closure. The dozer lines will be inventoried for cultural resources before treatments begin. Monitoring for noxious weed invasion in the burned and disturbed areas will be conducted and treatments will be applied if weeds are detected. Post-fire grazing management, including the period of time needed for closure, will be determined based on monitoring and achievement of site specific resource objectives.

Rationale:

Implementation of the proposed action described in the NFRP Supplement EA for the West Pequop Fire will protect soils in the burned area, including preventing potential loss of soil due to wind and water erosion; will reduce potential invasion and establishment of noxious weeds and cheatgrass; will provide quality forage for livestock and wildlife; and will facilitate meeting established standards and guidelines for livestock grazing.

The Wells Resource Management Plan is silent for the proposed action. The proposed action is consistent with the objectives of the RMP and is consistent with federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and plans to the maximum extent possible

Monitoring:

Post-treatment monitoring studies will be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed treatments and to determine the time frame for reopening lands for grazing.

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Helen Hankins Date
Elko Field Office

NORMAL FIRE REHABILITATION PLAN SUPPLEMENT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
WEST PEQUOP FIRE (X-157)
BLM/EK/PL-2001-046

Introduction:

This Supplement Environmental Assessment (EA) tiers to the Elko Field Office FY 2000 Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan Environmental Assessment (NRFPEA) BLM/EK/PL2001/037. The Proposed Action includes NFRPEA Treatment # 1 (Grazing closure), 5 (Dozer line Rehabilitation), 8 (Invasive, nonnative weed control), and 10 (Cultural resource site stabilization and protection). The format of this Supplement EA follows the outline in the Emergency Fire Rehabilitation Handbook, BLM Manual Handbook H-1742-1 dated 7/27/99.

List of Preparers:

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Project Area Description:

A. Fire Description:

The West Pequop fire was started by a lightning strike and was reported on July 3, 2001. The fire was declared out on July 11, 2001. The fire burned a total of 1,600 acres of public land and 1,896 acres of private land. The fire burned in the Big Springs grazing allotment. No structures were burned in the West Pequop Fire. The majority of the dozer line was constructed on low and moderate elevations along the burn perimeter. Fire severity was light to moderate over much of the area.

B. Vegetation and Soil Description:

The burned areas range in elevation from 6100 to 7200 ft. They consist of a number of range sites with the potential to support a variety of plant communities. The plant communities at higher

elevations are dominated by mountain big sagebrush, low sage brush, bitterbrush, Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, Letterman needlegrass and a variety of perennial forbs. Pinyon and juniper woodland is also present at all elevations. The plant communities at the mid to lower elevations are dominated by basin big sagebrush, bluebunch wheatgrass, Canby bluegrass, Nevada bluegrass, Thurber's needlegrass, and a variety of forbs. Field observations of unburned islands and adjacent areas outside of the burn indicate that the plant communities within the burn were in satisfactory condition prior to the burn and should recover with rest from livestock grazing.

Soils in the northern portion of the burn are located on mountain valley fans on 2 to 15 % slopes. They are shallow to moderately deep over bedrock, and may have a small amount of gravel within their profile. These soils have medium surface textures, and heavy subsoils. Runoff is medium and permeability is moderately slow to slow. Wind erosion hazard is slight and water erosion hazard is slight to moderate.

Soils on hills occur on 4 to 30% slopes and are shallow over bedrock except for small areas on concave sideslopes that are deep. These soils have very high gravel and cobble content and are also high in calcium carbonate. They have medium to rapid runoff and moderately slow to moderate permeability. Textures are dominantly loams or silt loams, with gravel and cobble. Water erosion hazard is slight to moderate, and the wind erosion hazard is slight.

Soils on the steepest slopes, 15 to 50%, are shallow over bedrock They are medium textured soils with very high gravel and cobble contents. Runoff is rapid and permeability is moderate. Water erosion hazard is moderate to high and wind erosion hazard is slight.

Wind and water erosion rates would be at higher than preburn levels until the vegetation is reestablished. If a large runoff event occurs before the vegetation is reestablished, it could cause mud and debris flows. The areas of greatest concern are the wooded steep slopes. Similar areas in other fires in the district have had large mud and debris flows following intense precipitation events.

Proposed Project Treatments:

A. Revegetation:

1. Planting of multiple species seed mixtures:

Approximately 17 miles of dozer line would be drill and aerial seeded with a mix composed of Nordan crested wheatgrass, Siberian wheatgrass and forage kochia to reduce erosion and encourage revegetation.

2. Invasive, nonnative weed control:

If noxious weeds are detected during and after fire rehabilitation efforts, appropriate Integrated Pest Management (IPM) control measures would be implemented to control the invasion. In particular, any disturbed roads, dozer lines, and adjacent areas would be targeted for this noxious weed monitoring and subsequent treatment if weeds are detected.

B. Structures:

1. Blocking of vehicular access points:

Approximately 100 feet of access points from existing roads to the dozer lines would be ripped and blocked with boulders, rocks, and dead junipers to prevent potential resource damage from unauthorized vehicular travel in the burn area.

2. Fencing:

Approximately 0.3 miles of existing fence would be repaired to facilitate closure of the burned area to grazing for a period to be determined by post-rehabilitation monitoring. This fence is necessary to allow for vegetation to become reestablished.

C. Erosion Control Treatments:

1. Dozer line rehabilitation:

Approximately 17 miles of bulldozer-damaged areas have been rehabilitated by pushing back berms and regrading the disturbed areas. These rehabilitated areas would be drilled and aerial seeded with a mix composed of crested wheatgrass, Siberian wheatgrass and forage kochia to reduce erosion and encourage revegetation.

D. Site Preparation: None

E Other:

1. Cultural resource inventories:

Cultural resource inventories would be conducted along the 17 miles of dozer line rehabilitation. These inventories would identify any cultural resources that might need to be protected during rehabilitation treatments.

Consideration of Critical Elements and Resources:

The following critical elements of the human environment are not present or are not affected by the proposed action or alternative:

ACECs
Environmental Justice
Farmlands, prime or unique
Floodplains
Wastes, hazardous/solid
Wetlands/Riparian Areas
Wild and Scenic Rivers
Wilderness

Critical elements and resources brought forward for analysis:

A. Air Quality:

The burned area is highly susceptible to wind erosion until revegetation occurs. Wind erosion can increase Particulate Matter #10 (PM#10) emissions causing accedence of PM #10 air quality standards which can negatively affect human health. In addition, airborne dust can cause visibility and safety problems on roads in the area. The proposed rest from grazing and dozer line rehabilitation would encourage regrowth of vegetation, thus reducing future potential air quality impacts.

B. Cultural Resources:

The West Pequop Fire occurred within an area known to archaeologists as the Central Great Basin which has been inhabited by humans for approximately 12,000 years. Archaeological sites and cultural properties in this area must be afforded protection whenever possible. Section 106 of the Natural Historic Preservation Act mandates that the federal government will account for cultural resources in its projects and undertakings, including fire rehabilitation efforts. Ground disturbing activities such as dozer line rehabilitation could damage cultural sites. Therefore, areas designated for mechanized seeding and other ground disturbance will be inventoried for cultural resources before the disturbance occurs in accordance with the State Protocol Agreement Between BLM, Nevada and the Nevada State Office of Historic Preservation (SHPO). At a minimum, to reduce potential impacts to cultural resources, activities that involve mechanized surface disturbance of less than 10 cm depth would generally have transect spacing of 100 meters. More intense inventory would be used for highly sensitive areas. If surface disturbance is greater than 10 cm, then 30 meter transect intervals would be used.

All cultural resources discovered or relocated would be plotted on maps and at a minimum would be recorded on the Nevada IMACS short form. Resources except those previously determined not eligible, by BLM and SHPO, or that have been fully mitigated, would be flagged for avoidance and avoided during rehabilitation activities. Flagging would be placed to minimize the potential for looting and vandalism and removed as soon as possible.

C. Invasive, Nonnative Species:

Fire suppression efforts, including dozer line construction and use of engines and other mechanized vehicles, is likely to have introduced cheatgrass and noxious weed species seeds into the burned area. In order to reduce the potential impacts of an invasion of noxious weeds, monitoring should be conducted after rehabilitation treatments are completed. If noxious weeds are discovered to have invaded the burn area, herbicide treatments would need to be implemented to reduce the spread of the noxious weeds. Monitoring and noxious weed treatment would help to prevent or reduce any such noxious weed impacts in the West Pequop Fire area.

D. Native American Religious Concerns:

Native Americans would be consulted as appropriate prior to any ground disturbing activitiesherbicide use. If traditional cultural properties or other areas having traditional or religious significance to Native Americans are discovered as a result of this consultation, then BLM would insure that measures are taken to avoid or reduce impacts to these areas of concern to Native Americans.

E. Threatened, Endangered, Candidate, or Sensitive Species:

The sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) has been designated by the BLM Nevada State Director as a sensitive species and therefore afforded the same protection as a candidate species. Although the suspected causes of sage grouse decline are numerous, loss of habitat, including loss by fire, ranks at the top of the list. Rehabilitation of sage grouse habitat, and the prevention of invasion by fire prone annual weeds such as cheatgrass, is a wildlife priority of both BLM and the Nevada Department of Wildlife. The proposed seeding treatment and rest from grazing are designed to restore sagebrush habitat and/or reduce the impacts from the invasion or re-invasion of fire prone annual weeds.

F. Visual Resources:

The proposed project treatment area is within Visual Resource Management Class III and changes in this class should be subordinate to the existing landscape. Both the fire itself and fire suppression activities such as creation of dozer lines have resulted in visual impacts to the area. Revegetation efforts are designed to blend into the background without attracting undue attention and aid in restoring the area to a more characteristic landscape. Seeding the dozer lines would serve to reduce the visual impacts in the area.

G. Wildlife:

Wildlife was adversely impacted by the West Pequop Fire primarily through temporary loss of habitat through removal of vegetation by the fire. The proposed rehabilitation treatments, in conjunction with resting the area from livestock grazing, would ensure the post-burn recovery of native vegetation, thereby enhancing wildlife habitat values in the burned area.

H. Grazing:

The proposed closures to grazing within the burned area would protect seeding efforts and aid in natural revegetation of burned public rangeland, while reducing the potential for future noxious weed and cheatgrass infestations. Grazing closures would also improve future forage conditions for both livestock and wildlife. However, grazing closure and relocation of livestock will have some short term adverse impacts on ranchers in the area who normally use the allotment for grazing. The actual AUM losses suffered by ranchers have not been determined at this point. Through field inventories and monitoring, GIS analyses, and consultation, cooperation, and coordination with individual permittees, specific rest periods and other grazing management options will be identified to reduce impacts to ranchers where possible.

I. Migratory Birds:

The proposed restorative actions are located in a sagebrush habitat type. The Nevada Partners in Flight Bird Conservation Plan identifies the following bird species associated with this physiographic region: sage grouse (obligate), black rosy finch, ferruginous hawk, gray flycatcher, loggerhead shrike,
vesper sparrow, prairie falcon, sage sparrow, sage thrasher, Swainson's hawk, burrowing owl, calliope hummingbird, Brewer's sparrow, Western meadowlark, black-throated sparrow, lark sparrow, green-tailed towhee, Brewer's blackbird, horned lark, and lark sparrow.

The greatest threat to these sagebrush-dependant migratory bird species is type conversion of sagebrush communities. Maintaining complete, diverse sagebrush communities is integral to conservation efforts for these species. Low elevation sagebrush sites, such as the project area, are vulnerable to conversion to cheatgrass types following wildfire. The proposed action to reseed with aggressive perennial grasses to prevent cheatgrass from dominating the site, coupled with secondary efforts to reestablish sagebrush on the stabilized site (as necessary) should provide beneficial impacts to these species and is consistent with the conservation measures listed in Section 3(e) of the President's Migratory Bird Executive Order.

J. Water Quality, surface/ground:

There are no perennial streams within the burned area. Precipitation events would cause higher than normal runoff until the vegetation is restored to preburn conditions. There is a potential threat of culverts along the railroad tracks, on the north side of the burn, filling up with debris and causing flooding following a large rainstorm. The proposed dozer line seedings and closing the area to grazing would be reduce the likelihood of flood damage to the railroad.

Project Cost Summary: (the cost summary information can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan and Accomplishment Report for the Elko 14 Fire Complex)

Project Maps: (project maps can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan and Accomplishment Report for the Elko 14 Fire Complex)

Cost/Risk Assessment: (the cost/risk assessment can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan and Accomplishment Report for the Elko 14 Fire Complex)

Native/Nonnative Worksheet: (the native/nonnative worksheet can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan and Accomplishment Report for the Elko 14 Fire Complex)